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Abstract:

Religious knowledge is at the heart of the Shi'i system of clerical authority known as the *marja'iyya*. Given the multiplicity of more or less well-established claimants to the position, this article explores the scholarly credentials of the contemporary *marja'* (source of emulation; pl. *marāji'*). I conceptualize the *marja'iyya* with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the field in order to examine how scholarly capital is defined, and possibly redefined, by fourteen religious scholars competing in this *marja'iyya* field in Iraq. To do so, I use their 'official' biographies in Arabic and analyze the types of credentials of scholarly capital that are put forth to legitimate the claims of these *marāji'*. I argue that, despite the multiplicity and diversity of contenders, there is a fair degree of homogeneity in the ways scholarly capital is defined. In the biographies, the *marāji'*'s scholarly capital is validated against three broad indicators: their inherited scholarly capital, which stems from their family background; their educational capital; and the intellectual-scientific prestige capital derived from their scholarly and teaching activities. The credentials emphasized in the different biographies are generally much alike, and if a *marja'* does not satisfy them, 'almost-like' credentials are constructed. Abidance to shared codes and practices reflects, as well as contributes to, the stability of the *marja'iyya* field.

Keywords: Shi'ism; Iraq; religious authorities; *marja'iyya*; competition; scholarly capital; Bourdieu's field theory; biographies.

Before his claim to the *marjaʿiyya*, al-Sayyid [Mahmud al-Sarkhi] al-Hasani was loved. They were saying that al-Sayyid al-Hasani represents the morals of the *hawza* [Shiʿi seminaries] and has great knowledge. But when he reached the *marjaʿiyya*, they started their war against the Sayyid with various means, techniques, the spread of rumors, suspicions, and charges. His Eminence was subject to much oppression by a number of people of the community [of learning]. [...]. They said “Crazy”. They said “He is the thief of the research of his teacher [...]. They said: “He is delusional”. They say: “He is not a Sayyid”.¹

The *marjaʿiyya* is the central system of clerical authority in Shiʿism by which a qualified religious scholar acts as a source of emulation (*marjaʿ al-taqlīd*; pl. *marājiʿ*) by offering guidance to the believers who have chosen to follow his legal opinions. Famously, ‘Ali al-Sistani is today the most widely-followed *marjaʿ* worldwide. However, the *marjaʿiyya* is not the prerogative of one holder. Characteristic of its poly-cephalic nature² is the claim to the position of Mahmud al-Sarkhi, among many other scholars (‘ulamāʾ; sing. *ʿālim*).³ As indicated by al-Sarkhi’s experience captured in the above quote, claims can be contested. This begs the question of how, and on what ground, a *marjaʿ* is recognized as such.

This question has no straightforward answer and can be approached from different perspectives. The Shiʿi juristic texts dealing with the principle of *taqlīd* (emulation) list what Rula Jurdi Abisaab calls the ‘objective conditions’ that a *marjaʿ* ought to fulfil.⁴ Besides other personal qualities, he must possess knowledge (*ʿilm*) – if not also be, according to many, the most learned (*al-aʿlam*).⁵ When it comes to actual practice, the recognition of a *marjaʿ* is elusive. On the one hand, the lack of precise measures to assess levels of knowledge makes this requirement quite lax. On the other hand, variables not mentioned in the juristic literature also come into play. A *marjaʿ*’s nationality and place of residence, his political inclination or

lack thereof, as well as perceptions of his overall popularity might affect popular preferences.⁶ In addition, ‘subjective conditions’ related to the sociological working of the *marjaʿiyya* – for instance networks, financial power, and social visibility – are crucial for the establishment and maintenance of *marjaʿ* status.⁷ The informality of the selection process explains in part the multiplicity of claimants to the *marjaʿiyya*.⁸

This article explores the requirement of knowledge for *marjaʿ* status. It shifts attention from the juristic elaboration of this requirement to consider the actual scholarly qualifications on which contemporary *marājiʿ* claim the position. For that purpose, and as further clarified in the first section of this article, I conceptualize the *marjaʿiyya* with Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the field. Currently occupied by dozens of scholars of more or less well-established stature, the *marjaʿiyya* field is a site of competition over the species of capital efficacious in it. While other species of capital (ethical, social, philanthropic, political, etc.) also matter in this field, the focus here is on scholarly capital. How is scholarly capital defined and possibly redefined within and by the contemporary *marjaʿiyya* field? In empirical terms, the credentials of knowledge claimed by various *marājiʿ* can serve as indicators of what constitutes scholarly capital. I glean these credentials from the official biographies found on the personal websites of a selection of *marājiʿ*, a genre labelled as their ‘online eulogies’.⁹ These biographies present the *marājiʿ*’s scholarly qualifications and achievements, and hence constitute a uniform body of sources to analyze the bases on which scholarly capital is claimed.

My analysis will support the argument that, despite the multiplicity and diversity of contemporary claimants to the position of *marjaʿ*, there is a fair degree of homogeneity in the ways scholarly capital is defined in backing these many and sometimes contested claims. In the biographies, the *marājiʿ*’s scholarly capital is established against the following three broad indicators: their inherited scholarly capital, which stems from their family background; their educational capital, such as their religious training and certifications; and the intellectual-

scientific prestige capital derived from their scholarly and teaching activities. For each indicator, the credentials emphasized in the biographies are, all in all, the same. In a situation when a *marja'* does not seem to satisfy a credential typically claimed by others, his biography will moreover often propose instead what I call 'almost-like' credentials. Abidance to shared codes and practices reflects, as well as contributes to, the stability of the *marja'iyya* field.

Methodologically, I take the information provided in the biographies at face value, without trying to verify their authenticity or to fill in gaps. Because this study is interested in the credentials put forward in the *marāji'*s biographies as evidence of their scholarly capital, the need to differentiate historical data from the *marāji'*s (self-) projected image is not as pressing as it is, for instance, when using prosopographic material to write a social history of the Shi'i religious establishment.¹⁰ Moreover, these biographies serve here only the specific purpose of analyzing how they validate the condition of knowledge required of a *marja'*. My focus on the credentials advanced in these accounts by no means implies that those are the credentials that actually resonate with the people involved in the recognition of the *marāji'* – the *ahl al-khbra* (the 'people of experience', i.e. the religious elite) or ordinary believers.

Framing the *Marja'iyya* with Bourdieu's Theory of Field

This article enquires into the scholarly credentials of contemporary *marāji'* by conceptualizing the *marja'iyya*, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, as a field. A field is a quite autonomous, specialized, sphere of social practice with its own logic, rules, and functioning. Importantly, it is characterized by some type(s) of resources – coined by Bourdieu as species of capital – which is/are specifically efficacious in it. This is so 'because, at bottom, the value of a species of capital (e.g., knowledge of Greek or of integral calculus) hinges on the existence [...] of a field in which this competency can be employed'.¹¹ Capital presents itself under three core species, each of which can also be converted into the others.¹² Economic capital consists of material

resources. Cultural capital encompasses culturally-relevant knowledge, skills, aptitudes, and tastes that can exist in an embodied (e.g. an affinity to read books), objectified (e.g. a personal library) or institutionalized (e.g. a school diploma) state. Social capital consists of one's social network and the resources available through it. In addition, symbolic capital relates to notions of reputation, honor, and prestige. However, rather than being a fourth and distinct species *per se*, it is 'the form the other species take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate'.¹³ Bourdieu and other scholars have also explored other types of capital (e.g. literary, academic, religious, bureaucratic or juridical capital) that are related to corresponding fields.

Given the juristic requirement of religious knowledge for *marja'* status, this article focuses on scholarly capital, somewhat a variant of cultural capital. The enquiry is partly empirical and descriptive. While confirming the value of scholarly capital in the *marja'iyya* field, it aims to determine its constitutive elements by identifying the credentials by which the knowledge of contemporary *marāji'* is legitimated. These credentials will be examined in relation to three indicators, or sub-types, of scholarly capital, which I have borrowed selectively from the work of Bourdieu on the French academic field and adapted to the Shi'i seminaries context.¹⁴ They are: inherited scholarly capital; educational capital; and intellectual-scientific prestige capital.

The conceptualization of the *marja'iyya* as a field is also useful to analyze the definition of scholarly capital in light of inter-*marja'* competition. A field is a site of competition and struggle over the monopoly of the specific authority that characterizes it – here Shi'i scholarly authority. Agents active in the field are situated at a given time in more or less dominant positions determined by their endowment in capital. These positions also inform their habitus and the stances (position-taking) they will take in the field. Species of capital are not only a weapon but also a stake, however. Struggles in a field are 'ultimately [about] the conservation or subversion of the structure of the distribution of the specific capital.'¹⁵ To use Bourdieu's analogy of the field with a game, capital is similar to a pile of tokens in the hands of players.

The whole pile constitutes the volume of capital, while tokens of different colors represent different types or sub-types of capital, that is its structure. When playing, players adopt strategies – also called the feel for a game – which often reflect the relative size and composition of their pile of tokens. They play to conserve (conservation strategy) or acquire (strategy of succession) the tokens with the most value in the specific game. Alternatively, players might attempt, resorting to a subversion strategy, to change the valuation of tokens in the game, so as to valorize the (sub-)type(s) they hold and depreciate the pile of other players.¹⁶

Accordingly, I examine scholarly capital as a stake of struggle in the *marjaʿiyya* field. To clarify, the struggle is not about questioning the necessity of scholarly capital for *marjaʿ* status. The emphasis placed in the *marājiʿ*’s biographies on their scholarly achievements confirms that scholarly capital is precisely what is deemed worth fighting for. The recognition that scholarly capital matters is part of the *doxa*, the implicit and taken-for-granted presuppositions of the immanent laws of the *marjaʿiyya* field and its stakes.¹⁷ Rather, the struggle is over the legitimation of the *marājiʿ*’s respective scholarly capital. At the heart of this struggle is the definition of scholarly capital – and, from a more micro perspective, the definition of its constitutive elements, or what makes a token a token of scholarly capital. As the analysis of the biographies will show, the different *marājiʿ* all in all claim the same types of scholarly credentials. These credentials can thus be considered as those with value in the *marjaʿiyya* field. The question is also whether the struggle entails attempts to redefine scholarly capital in order to subvert its distribution in the field. A case in point is the situation when a *marjaʿ* does not possess a scholarly credential commonly claimed by his counterparts. Instead, the biographies will often put forth what I call an ‘almost-like’ credential, which approximates in some way the lacking credential. As this indicates, the strategy employed to inflate the value of one’s scholarly capital is not highly subversive. The use of almost-like credentials attests, and further contributes, to the recognition, not the rejection, of the scholarly credentials conventionally

valued in the field. The article's empirical analysis will confirm Bourdieu's anticipation that fields are no sites of big revolutions because a degree of homogeneity rises among competitors.

Fourteen *marāji'* active in the Iraqi *marja'iyya* field

The scope of this article is limited to the Iraqi *marja'iyya* field. While the leadership of a *marja'* is often transnational and cannot be reduced to a particular national context, I have selected thirteen figures who are in their majority based in Iraq, or if they are not, have been trained there and orient their leadership claim particularly towards the Iraqi Shi'i scene.¹⁸

Within this geographical scope, I have included any scholar who is currently making a claim to the position of *marja'*. My criterion was that he is introduced in his official website with the title *al-marja' al-dīnī* (religious source).¹⁹ The question of whether these figures have the necessary credentials to be recognized as a *marja'* is not relevant for my selection. Suffice is that they have an interest, an investment coined by Bourdieu as *illusio*, in the *marja'iyya* game and its stakes, which their mere claim to the position confirms.²⁰ The list of selected *marāji'* is however not exhaustive due to a practical consideration. Since this study is based on the *marāji'*'s online biographies, I have selected only the figures with a (working) website.²¹

The selection of *marāji'* includes the quadrumvirate of Najaf: 'Ali al-Sistani,²² Ishaq al-Fayyad,²³ Sa'id al-Hakim,²⁴ and Bashir al-Najafi.²⁵ Of diverse national origins – Iranian, Afghan, Iraqi, and Pakistani, respectively – they have all made their career in the Iraqi shrine city. Najaf also hosts other holders of the *marja'* title, among whom A'la al-Din al-Ghurayfi,²⁶ Salih al-Ta'i,²⁷ and Muhammad al-Ya'qubi,²⁸ in addition to Muhammad al-Sanad who was born in Bahrain.²⁹ Moving to other shrine cities in Iraq, my selection includes Muhammad Husayn al-Sadr in Kadhimayn,³⁰ Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi who, after decades spent in exile, is now based in his home city of Karbala',³¹ and Mahmud al-Sarkhi also in Karbala' although his current whereabouts are unknown. Finally, I consider Kazim al-Ha'iri³² and Sadiq al-Shirazi³³

who, despite being established in Qum, orient their *marja'iyya* particularly towards Iraqi Shi'a. Also based in Iran, though educated in Najaf, is Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi³⁴. He is worthy of attention because of his attempts in recent years to prepare, as an Iran-backed candidate, his leadership claim in Najaf in anticipation of 'Ali al-Sistani's death.

These *marāji'* can be classified into two broad generational groups, each based on age and the period of entry into the *marja'iyya* field. The first generation was born in the 1930s and 1940s and announced their *marja'iyya* during the 1990s or the very early 2000s. They are 'Ali al-Sistani (b. 1930), Ishaq al-Fayyad (b. 1930), Sa'id al-Hakim (b. 1934), Kazim al-Ha'iri (b. 1938), Bashir al-Najafi (b. 1942), Sadiq al-Shirazi (b. 1942), Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi (b. 1945), and A'la al-Din al-Ghurayfi (b. 1946). Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi (b. 1948) belongs to the same age group but he waited until 2010 to announce his *marja'iyya*. Currently in their 50s or 60s, the second generation represent, with Husayn al-Sadr (b. 1952), Salih al-Ta'i (b. 1958), Muhammad al-Ya'qubi (b. 1960), Muhammad al-Sanad (b. 1961), and Mahmud al-Sarkhi (b. 1965), additional contenders to the *marja'iyya* after regime change in 2003.

Although not exhaustive, this list of selected *marāji'* captures the multiplicity and diversity of competitive claims which are characteristic of the *marja'iyya* field. The rest of this article will explore how scholarly capital is defined in light of these many claims to *marja'* status, as portrayed in the biographies. While specific examples will be provided, this is a study of the constitutive elements of scholarly capital that are generally valued in the *marja'iyya* field, rather than one of the scholarly capital with which each individual *marja'* is endowed.³⁵

Inherited Scholarly Capital

Bourdieu puts much weight in his field analyses on the social background of the actors. Among other social determinants, family background is a source of inherited capital, for all kinds of species but particularly so for cultural capital in its embodied state.³⁶ In *Homo Academicus*, the

social determinants of inherited capital determine the chances of access to the positions occupied in the field.³⁷ In the case of the *marāji*^ʿ, the information provided in their biographies on their family background confirms the importance of inherited capital, commonly called *nasab* (honor acquired through descent) in Muslim societies.³⁸ In particular, being born into a family of knowledge (*bayt al-ʿilm*) is a strong credential of inherited scholarly capital for the *marāji*^ʿ who can claim it. After discussing how this credential is validated in the biographies, this section will illustrate the strategy of proposing an almost-like credential in the case of the *marāji*^ʿ who lack a clerical family background.

Most of *marāji*^ʿ come from a family of knowledge.³⁹ Their biography typically introduces the ancestors and/or relatives whose scholarly career attests to the family's scholarly capital and hence to the *marja*^ʿ's inherited capital. When possible, family credentials are established in reference to family members who were recognized as a *marja*^ʿ in their own time.⁴⁰ Alternatively, the family's long-lasting scholarly legacy is emphasized. Husayn al-Sadr's biography names two figures of the sixteenth century, Sahib al-Maʿalim (d. 1602) and Sahib al-Madarik (d. 1600), who are known after the major work they respectively authored.⁴¹ It also selectively introduces Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (d. 1980) and Musa al-Sadr (disappeared in 1978) to validate the contemporary importance of the al-Sadr family.

The *marāji*^ʿ with a clerical background do not all come from as renowned and prolific families as the like of the al-Hakim, al-Sadr or al-Shirazi families. In such cases, the biographies propose various indicators of the family's scholarly capital. Al-Sistani's biography focuses on a specific figure, his grand-father, who is credited with an entry in a famous biographical work on Shiʿi ʿulamāʾ. Highlighting quantity instead, the website of Muhammad al-Yaʿqubi provides a chart of all the family's ʿulamāʾ.⁴²

These practices of capitalizing on the prestige of families emphasize inherited scholarly capital in its symbolic form. In line with Bourdieu's expectations, a clerical family background

also contributes to scholarly capital in its embodied state, that is ‘in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’.⁴³ The biographies hint at the transmission within the *marāji*’s families of their disposition to knowledge. Discussions of their childhood sometimes mention a propitious home environment or the role of nurturers in ‘fill[ing] [their] heart with the love of *‘ilm* and with the spirit of faith’.⁴⁴ Moreover, a clerical family background often gave the *marāji*’ access within the home to their first teachers: a father and sometimes a mother, a grandfather or an uncle. Socialization into a culture of knowledge also happened more informally. According to his biography, Muhammad al-Ya‘qubi is the son of a preacher. As a child, he used to accompany his father on his *tablīgh* (propagation) missions and would then proudly recite to his mother the sermons he had heard his father deliver. Inherited capital is thus also linked to the acquisition of educational capital, a topic discussed in the next section.

It is instructive to compare the case of the *marāji*’ who come from a clerical family with those who lack this credential.⁴⁵ While acknowledging their more humble background, the biographies still credit the parents of these *marāji*’ with part of their scholarly success. Ishaq al-Fayyad’s father is described as a pious farmer who foresaw his son’s ‘bright future at the service of religion and the Muslim community’ and therefore enrolled him in a religious school. Similarly, Mahmud al-Sarkhi’s upbringing in a ‘simple family known for its integrity’ shaped the ethics for which, his biography continues, he is known in the *hawza*. These accounts resemble those found in the biographies of the *marāji*’ with a clerical family background and which I have analyzed as illustrations of hereditary transmission of scholarly capital in its embodied state. As such, a humble non-clerical family background is proposed as the almost-like credential of a clerical family background.

The family background of the *marāji*’ is thus worthy of mention in the biographies, especially but not only if it is clerical, because it determines at least partly their scholarly

capital. Nonetheless, inherited scholarly capital is given less weight than the indicators of acquired scholarly capital which will be analyzed in the following sections.

Educational capital

A second indicator of scholarly capital is educational capital. For Bourdieu, the schools attended and the diplomas obtained are determinants of educational capital.⁴⁶ Education in the Shi'i seminaries lacks formalized procedures. However, the plethora of information provided in the biographies on the *marāji*'s *ṭalab al-ilm* (quest for knowledge) point to various credentials – as well as related almost-like credentials – of educational capital. This section reviews the credentials related first to the *marāji*'s religious training and next to their scholarly qualifications, in particular the much-needed capacity to exercise *ijtihād*.

Educational capital credentials are broadly of two kinds. Many credentials are established in relation to the scholars who trained the *marāji*' and recognized their highest level of knowledge. Educational capital thus stems in great part from scholarly networks in the seminaries – that is social capital. Other credentials are based on the personal qualities of the *marāji*' which facilitate the acquisition of educational capital in its embodied state.

The quest for knowledge

The road towards the highest levels of knowledge in the Shi'i seminaries is a long one. A first stage, the *muqaddamāt* (preliminaries), is dedicated to the linguistic sciences (Arabic morphology, grammar, and rhetoric) as well as logic and, optionally, theology. At the intermediate level, the *suṭūḥ* (lit. the surfaces), students study works in *fiqh* (law) and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (jurisprudence), in addition to other disciplines. Accordingly, the *marāji*'s biographies list, though more or less exhaustively, the texts studied in the first two levels. The most

advanced level is the *baḥṭh al-khārij* (lit. the externals). It no longer entails set texts but consists of classes in which a subject of law is explored to train the students in the practice of *ijtihād*.⁴⁷

While completion of the curriculum is valuable in itself, teachers are of prime importance. Education in the *ḥawza*, a term which originally referred to the study circles around a master, is characterized by its informal and personalistic nature. Knowledge is passed on from teacher to student, a process that establishes scholarly lineage between them. Teacher-student networks are social capital which can be thus converted into educational capital. The resources available through such networks entail more than access to knowledge. The fame of the teachers – that is their own scholarly capital in its symbolic, legitimated form – is an important resource that adds value to the student's educational capital. Although the teachers of contemporary *marāji'* vary depending on the place and period of education, there are general features regarding how the educational capital inherent in teacher-student networks is validated in the biographies.

The biographies systematically name the teachers with whom the *marāji'* studied for the *baḥṭh al-khārij*, if not also at previous levels.⁴⁸ Because *baḥṭh al-khārij* classes are taught by the major scholars of a time, often the *marāji'*, claiming scholarly lineage to such figures is a source of prestige. For instance, 'Ali al-Sistani studied with several *marāji'* of the second half of the twentieth century: Muhammad Husayn Burujirdi (d. 1962) in Qum and, in Najaf, Muhsin al-Hakim (d. 1970), Mahmud al-Shahrudi (d. 1975), Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i (d. 1992), as well as Husayn al-Hilli (d. 1974) who was another prominent *mujtahid* though not a *marja'*. Given the generation gap between the current claimants to the *marja'iyya*, the younger ones sometimes studied under their more senior competitors. Although this can complicate claims to scholarly prominence, the biographies of Muhammad al-Ya'qubi and Mahmud al-Sarkhi acknowledge that they took the *baḥṭh al-khārij* classes of 'Ali al-Sistani and Ishaq al-Fayyad.

In the biographies, having been a student of former *marāji'* is thus a credential of educational capital. Almost-like credentials are also provided in the absence of this credential.

For instance, many Najaf-educated *marājiʿ* take pride in having studied with Abu al-Qasim al-Khuʿi, the most widely followed *marjaʿ* in the 1970s and 1980s who was also known in Najaf as the ‘Teacher of the *hawza*’.⁴⁹ In contrast, Muhammad al-Yaʿqubi, from the younger generation, did not make his way to the *baḥth al-khārij* level in time to join al-Khuʿi’s classroom before his death. Although al-Yaʿqubi’s biography emphasizes more his scholarly lineage to another *marjaʿ*, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, it still aims to confirm that he had some sort of connection to al-Khuʿi. Al-Yaʿqubi is reported to have passed the examinations held by al-Khuʿi’s office with flying colors.⁵⁰ He was also granted the right to wear clerical garb in a ceremony performed by none other than al-Khuʿi.⁵¹ Similarly, the biography of Muhammad al-Sanad, who studied in Qum, mentions that one of his teachers held a manuscript of the courses compiled by students of Najaf’s most prominent teachers, among them al-Khuʿi. These anecdotes credit al-Yaʿqubi and al-Sanad with credentials that approximates in some way the actual credential of being a former student of al-Khuʿi, which many of their competitors claim.

While the *marājiʿ* were trained by several teachers, whose famous names are all worth listing in their biography, they often claim special legacy from one of them. Al-Khuʿi features prominently in the biography of ‘Ali al-Sistani (along his other mentor Husayn al-Hilli) and of Ishaq al-Fayyad. Other *marājiʿ* trace their scholarly – and sometimes political – lineage to Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (d. 1980) and Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (d. 1998) of Najaf.⁵² For instance, Kazim al-Haʿiri’s biography explains that, after more than a decade of study with other scholars, he experienced a ‘shift in his scientific life’ at the hand of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. The biography of Sadiq al-Shirazi, who was trained in Karbala’, does not claim preferential legacy from any of his teachers, although it otherwise positions him clearly as the heir of the *marjaʿiyya* of his deceased teacher and brother Muhammad al-Shirazi (d. 2001).

The validation of educational capital on the basis of teachers entails another related feature. Because several *marājiʿ* often trace their scholarly lineage to the same scholar, none can claim

a monopoly on his renowned name. There follows a need to distinguish oneself from the group of former students. The biographies depict the high levels of personal intimacy that the *marājiʿ* enjoyed, as students, with their main mentor. Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi's website makes this point both in words and in image, with a 'Biography in pictures' that comprises photographs of the young al-Shahrudi posing with Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr.⁵³ Accounts of a teacher's fatherly affection for his disciple are also powerful. In Kazim al-Ha'iri's biography, the section 'His love for the teacher al-Sadr' provides quotes from the letters in which Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr addressed al-Ha'iri as 'My dear son'.⁵⁴ Some *marājiʿ* wrote biographies of their beloved mentor, another evidence of their intimate relationship.⁵⁵ Thus, the value of social capital does not just lie in teacher-student networks but is further increased by the quality of ties between them. The likening of these ties to a father-son relationship further adds an inherited dimension to the educational capital acquired through these networks.

Besides the quality of the scholarly networks in which the *marājiʿ* were embedded in their student years, the educational capital they acquired was also partly due to their personal qualities. In this regard, two main topoi are developed in the biographies. The first is intellectual precocity. Making what Sabrina Mervin calls an a posteriori valorization of precocity, the biographies often credit the *marājiʿ* with having shown, as children, signs of their future scholarly excellence.⁵⁶ Completion of the stages of the curriculum in less than the average years also attests intellectual precocity. For instance, while students in the older generation usually joined the *hawza* in their early teen years,⁵⁷ al-Mudarrisi was not even eight, according to his biography. He then reportedly became a *mujtahid* at twenty. This last figure contrasts with the more standard age – the early thirties – that other *marājiʿ* had upon achieving this level.

The biographies, especially those of the *marājiʿ* who were latecomers to the *hawza*, also modulate on the theme of intellectual precocity by proposing almost-like credentials. While it was customary in previous generations for a boy aiming at a clerical life to pursue a religious

education straight away, scholars of the younger generation often attended first the public and secular school system.⁵⁸ This was the case of Muhammad al-Sanad. Regardless, his biography credits him with intellectual precocity, albeit in a secular educational context. An IQ test allowed al-Sanad to start school at the age of four and a half and he then performed only fast and well in his studies. For his part, Muhammad al-Ya‘qubi graduated in engineering from Baghdad University before joining the *hawza*. Although he was already forty-three when he received certificates confirming his *mujtahid* status, his biography accords him the almost-like credential of precocity. It argues that al-Ya‘qubi had in fact acquired the capacity of *ijtihād* earlier on because his certificates of *ijtihād* mentioned works he had written years before.

The second topos exploited in several biographies refers to the *marāji‘*’s obstinacy, driven by their love of knowledge, in their *ṭalab al-‘ilm*. They faced obstacles on the road but showed unwavering commitment to surmounting them. This theme encapsulates the costly nature of the accumulation of cultural capital (here scholarly capital) in its embodied state, as recognized by Bourdieu. ‘*On paie de sa personne*, as we say in French’.⁵⁹ Ishaq al-Fayyad’s biography is emblematic. It details his peregrinations from the moment he set up his mind on leaving his village in Afghanistan to study in Najaf. When he finally settled in the Iraqi seminaries, his troubles were not yet over. He had to understand how the *hawza* worked, learn Arabic and new customs, and cope with the city’s hot summers and glacial winters, as well as with a precarious living. ‘We were eating bread and onions mostly, and no one could imagine eating so-called fruits’, he is quoted as saying in his biography. Al-Fayyad is the only *marja‘* of the older generation who lacks the prestige of being born into a clerical family. Moreover, he comes from the ‘periphery’, away from the Iraqi and Iranian centers of Shi‘ism. The lively account of his ‘*libido sciendi*, with all the privation, renunciation, and sacrifice that it may entail’, turns his outsider status into an advantage.⁶⁰ He stands out from his competitors, whose path to a clerical career all seems laid out before them.

The topos of the determined ‘*ālim* is particularly prominent in the case of the *marāji*’ who started the *hawza* late, after a university education. Their biographies portray them as autodidacts driven by a thirst for religious knowledge, and describe the alternative sources they found outside the *hawza* to nourish that thirst. Among other illustrations, the story of the years Muhammad al-Ya‘qubi spent hiding in his home to avoid serving in the Iraqi army during the Iran–Iraq War is powerful. It narrates how his father’s library, packed with religious sciences books, kept him company and made him ‘the happiest man’.⁶¹ According to the biographies, by the time these scholars finally enrolled in the seminaries, they had acquired enough knowledge to either skip the early stages of the religious curriculum or to complete them quickly thanks to their continued hard work.⁶² This combination of the topoi of both the determined and the intellectually precocious ‘*ālim* legitimizes the lesser time these *marāji*’ had in the *hawza* as compared to others who spent their lifetime there.

Scholarly qualifications

Educational capital entails, besides the credentials related to the *marāji*’s overall education, the certification of their scholarly qualifications. This aspect relates to Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital in the institutionalized state, although certification procedures are more informal in the *hawza* system than in the educational contexts studied by the French sociologist.⁶³ Seminary students progress through the stages of the curriculum not by examination but by permission from their teachers. The most formal certification they can hope to obtain is an *ijāza* (permission): an *ijāzat al-riwāya* (license to transmit) which authorizes a scholar to transmit works in the religious sciences, and/or an *ijāzat al-ijtihād* which recognizes his capacity to practice independent reasoning in deriving laws.⁶⁴ *Ijāzāt* are not diploma issued by the teaching institution. Scholars, generally one’s teachers, grant them in accordance with

their appreciation of the recipient's qualifications. Social capital inherent in scholarly networks contributes again to educational capital, here in the form of certified qualifications.

This section examines the ways by which the qualification of *ijtihād*, and the condition of *a'lamīyya* in some cases, are validated in the biographies. The certification of *mujtahid* status with an *ijāzat al-ijtihād* became common practice in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century in parallel with the development of the office of *marja'*.⁶⁵ According to the biographies, a majority of *marāji'* received at least one such *ijāza*. This is however not the case of several others, who all belong to the older generation.⁶⁶ One should not deduct that they found no one to attest their *ijtihād*. They might not have sought an *ijāza*, either because there was no absolute need for one in the *hawza* context when they were trained, or out of the same pride as that taken by past scholars for having no license of any sort.⁶⁷ Moreover and as illustrated below, the *ijāzat al-ijtihād* is still not the sole way by which *mujtahid* status is certified.

In the case of the *marāji'* credited with one or several *ijāzāt al-ijtihād*, the stature of the scholar(s) who licensed them is important. The symbolic capital inherent in their own fame is again a resource, which lends value here to the scholarly capital of the recipients of their *ijāzāt*. According to the biographies, several *marāji'* had their *ijtihād* certified by 'the greatest *marāji'* *al-taqlīd*'.⁶⁸ Specifics, such as the name of the grantors, are generally provided. Facsimiles or transcribed quotes of the actual *ijāza* are sometimes included.⁶⁹

The scholarly capital of the recipient of an *ijāza* also gains added value if he is one of the few who obtained such recognition from a particularly renowned scholar. This is what is suggested in 'Ali al-Sistani's biography. Al-Sistani has reportedly the quite unique credential of having received written *ijāzāt al-ijtihād* from Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i and Husayn al-Hilli, who were both extremely parsimonious in dispensing such certificates. This explanation implies that al-Sistani's scholarly credentials are stronger than those of other *marāji'* who studied with these scholars but cannot claim an *ijāza* from them.

The case of the *marāji'* who obtained their *ijāzāt* from lesser-known scholars is also instructive. It seems warranted that their biographies provide information on the qualifications of the person who validated their own. Accordingly, the *mujtahid* who granted Muhammad al-Ya'qubi's *ijāza* is described as having been himself licensed by Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i. Similarly, Mahmud al-Sarkhi's *ijtihād* and *a'lamīyya* were certified by students of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Vahid Khurasani (b. 1921), the latter being a former student of al-Khu'i. Illustrative of a strategy of capitalization on an almost-like credential, these references to the name of famous *marāji'* inflate the value of an *ijtihād* certified by a lesser figure.

There are other forms than an *ijāzat al-ijtihād* by which the *mujtahid* status of the *marāji'* was recognized by their seniors. An example of what is called 'scientific testimonies' in Husayn al-Sadr's biography is the positive assessment a teacher made of his writings as the 'first signs of the intellectual *ijtihādī* working of his mind'. Ishaq al-Fayyad's biography also reports that Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i recognized his 'seriousness, *ijtihād*, intelligence, and hard work' when he granted him permission to publish notes on his *baḥṭh al-khārij* lectures (*taqrīrāt*).⁷⁰ The biographies quote other laudatory testimonies, albeit lacking the '*ijtihād*' keyword, of the *marāji'*'s scholarly qualifications. A'la al-Din al-Ghurayfi's biography lists the reverential titles used to address him by the many scholars who gave him a license of some sort (none of which being an *ijāzat al-ijtihād*): *al-ʿālim al-fāḍil* (with also sometimes the addendum *al-warīʿ*) (the (pious) eminent scholar), (*janāb*) *al-ʿallāma* (the (honorable) erudite), *thiqat al-islām wa-l-muslimīn* (the trustee of Islam and Muslims), and *al-ḥujja* (a shortening of *ḥujjat al-islām*: the proof of Islam). The aim is to capitalize on, and even raise the value of, titles that are in fact not a proof of *mujtahid* status.⁷¹

Besides the *marāji'*'s qualification of *ijtihād*, the further qualification of *a'lamīyya* is addressed explicitly in two biographies. Sadiq al-Shirazi's *a'lamīyya* is validated against the skills of the *a'lam* for the deduction of laws, as laid out in the seminal juristic work *Al-ʿUrwa*

al-Wuthqa by Muhammad Kazim al-Yazdi (d. 1925). Not only do al-Shirazi's works, teaching, legal opinions, and disputations in matters of law constitute 'good evidence of his *a'lamīyya* and his mastery in deduction', but, as further clarified in his biography, this has also been seen by the experts among the 'ulamā'. This latter point confirms that claims of *a'lamīyya* need, like scholarly qualifications more generally, some legitimation from the scholarly community.

Mahmud al-Sarkhi's claim to *a'lamīyya* is more assertive and confrontational. Rather than being assessed in its own right, his superior knowledge is established in comparison with other *marāji'*. Evidence includes his works containing his objections (*ishkalāt*) to the research of Ishaq al-Fayyad, Kazim al-Ha'iri, Muhammad al-Ya'qubi, as well as the late Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i.⁷² He similarly engaged critically with the work of his late mentor Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, but this was 'to prove [...] [al-Sarkhi's] great knowledge. [...] And note, my dear [reader], the words of al-Sayyid [al-Sadr]: "[Al-Sarkhi] is knowledgeable, nay he is the most knowledgeable!"' The strength of al-Sarkhi's many *ishkalāt* is attested by the fact that 'no one was able to respond to [them], of course'. The biography further adds that it was in comparison with the research of some of the above *marāji'* that a scholar certified al-Sarkhi with *ijtihād* and *a'lamīyya*. Mahmud al-Sarkhi's scholarly pretensions have been dismissed in *hawza* circles, the biography notes, but their relentless efforts to 'kill him intellectually and socially' are just another proof that he is a threat to their own stature. So does the fact that they shunned any opportunity al-Sarkhi gave them to challenge him and his work.

Al-Sarkhi's claim to *a'lamīyya* is unconventional in that it overtly discredits other scholars. Yet, his scholarly qualifications are established in his biography on the basis of the *ijāzāt* he obtained, the praises of his knowledge by the late Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, and the fact that some of the current *marāji'* had recognized his knowledge, morals, and piety before he entered in competition with them. In brief, al-Sarkhi is not portrayed as a self-proclaimed *a'lam*. His

claim follows the established code by which scholarly capital requires legitimation from within the clerical community, the feature emphasized throughout this section.

Intellectual-scientific prestige capital

A third indicator of scholarly capital in the *marjaʿiyya* field relates to scholarly activities and the prestige associated with them. One source of intellectual-scientific prestige capital is the works the *marājiʿ* authored. More poetically, ‘The pen is the voice of the writer’s mind, the carrier of his knowledge, and the expression of his understanding.’⁷³ Intellectual-scientific prestige capital is also derived from the role of the *marājiʿ* as teachers. This section reviews the main credentials related to these activities, as put forth in the biographies. These credentials entail both a quantitative and qualitative dimension, the latter owing much to the symbolic capital inherent in scholarly lineages and teacher-student relationships.

The production of scholarship

The works authored by the *marājiʿ*, which are introduced in the biographies or in separate sections on the websites, constitute intellectual-scientific prestige capital in an objectified state. In general terms, attention is paid not so much to the substance of the scholarship they produced, but rather to its quantitative weight. Long lists of book titles are provided, in some cases along with specifics on the number of volumes composing these works or the language(s) they were translated into. These lists are sometimes organized by subject – such as *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *fiqh*, *tafsīr* (Qurʾan commentary), ethics, and sometimes philosophy, history, social issues, politics, etc.⁷⁴ The overall picture of the *marājiʿ* that emerges is that of prolific scholars well versed in a wide range of disciplines. Crucially, the listed works also include at least one *risāla ʿamaliyya* (practical treatise).⁷⁵ This genre is associated with *marjaʿ* status, for any claimant to the position will formally put himself forward by issuing such a legal treatise, containing his

rulings on various aspects of religious practice, which his followers will follow.⁷⁶ The biographies often provide the addendum *risāla ‘amaliyya* to the title of the works qualifying as one, making the nature of the work clear to the reader.

Some of the listed titles indicate that intellectual-scientific prestige capital is derived in part from the symbolic capital inherent in the scholarly traditions in which the *marāji‘* position their work. For their *risāla ‘amaliyya*, several *marāji‘* adopted the common practice of writing glosses on classic *risālāt*, namely Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim’s *Minhaj al-Salihin* (The Path of the Righteous) and *Tawzih al-Masa’il* (The Clarification of the Questions) of Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Burujirdi.⁷⁷ These *risālāt* thus capitalize on a well-established and easily identifiable scholarly tradition. A’la al-Din al-Ghurayfi preferred to draw on the symbolic capital associated with his scholarly family background – a further illustration of the value of inherited scholarly capital. For his treatise, he borrowed the title of a work written by an ancestor of the 16th century, a work anachronistically called a ‘*risāla*’ in his biography.

Another type of works, the *taqrīrāt* genre, indicates that teacher-student relationships, already so central for the constitution of educational capital, are also a source of intellectual-scientific prestige capital. The *taqrīrāt* consist of the notes collated by a student of his teacher’s *baḥth al-khārij* lectures. Their publication, which is authorized by the teacher in question, raises the status of the collator to the rank of the disciples able to uphold the master’s scholarly tradition. The *taqrīrāt* establish levels of distinction not only between the *marāji‘* who claim an attachment to different mentors, but also between those who were part of the same student circles. Among the many *marāji‘* who studied with Abu al-Qasim al-Khu’i, only Ishaq al-Fayyad and Sa’id al-Hakim, according to the information provided in the biographies, published notes of his lectures. The single reference to a *taqrīrāt* of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr’s classes is the one compiled by Kazim al-Ha’iri. Because Muhammad al-Ya’qubi and Mahmud al-Sarkhi both published notes of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr’s lectures, neither of them has

monopoly over the scholarly legacy of their mentor. Besides the particular *taqrīrāt* genre, the writings of the *marājiʿ* often include commentaries of the *risāla ʿamaliyya* and other works authored by their former teachers or other famous scholars of the past.

Teaching

Teaching is another activity related to intellectual-scientific prestige capital. In the seminary educational system, a scholar typically starts his teaching career while still studying. He will teach the preliminaries after joining the intermediate level, and later give *suṭūḥ* classes during his *baḥth al-khārij* studies. After the level of *ijtihād* is reached, an aspiring *marjaʿ* will eventually open his own *baḥth al-khārij* classes. The biographies provide more or less detailed descriptions of the texts or courses the *marājiʿ* have taught at different levels.⁷⁸ Their teaching methodology for the *baḥth* is occasionally discussed.⁷⁹ The schools where they have taught are also worthy of mention, as a renowned institution can lend legitimacy to one's teaching. For instance, the biographies of Ishaq al-Fayyad and Bashir al-Najafī clarify that the Dar al-ʿIlm School, in which both *marājiʿ* were teachers, was founded by the late Abu al-Qasim al-Khuʿi.

The prestige capital associated with teaching stems in great part from the social capital inherent in teacher-student networks. The students who 'drank from the pool of [the *marājiʿ*'s] lecture[s]' are introduced in the biographies as both quantitative or qualitative measures of their fame.⁸⁰ Aʿla al-Din al-Ghurayfī's biography for instance provides a sample list of his students. It further enumerates the *ijāzāt al-riwāya* al-Ghurayfī granted to some forty scholars – issuing such licenses is a source of prestige.⁸¹ Other *marājiʿ* are said to have trained students who became eminent scholars, *mujtahids*, and teachers in Najaf, Qum, and elsewhere worldwide.⁸² If the biographies do not all name their famous students – 'out of humility', as explained in Bashir al-Najafī's biography – the portrayal of these *marājiʿ* as the source of a wide-reaching scholarly network demonstrates the impact of their teaching well beyond their classrooms, both

in time and in space. The biographies of Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi and Kazim al-Ha'iri offer a broader definition of their student network by including graduates they have not taught directly but who studied in the schools established with their patronage.

Students do not just serve as indicators of the extent and quality of a *marja'*'s network of learning. With their first-hand experience of his teaching, they are also well placed to evaluate and vouch for his scholarship. The inventory of the many proofs of Mahmud al-Sarkhi's *a'lamīyya* includes a positive assessment by his students: 'a lot of' them, who also took the classes of other high-ranking teachers, found his *baḥth* to be 'more solid and accurate'. Al-Sarkhi's biography is however the only biography that quotes student testimonials.

Conclusion

This article has examined the scholarly credentials of the contemporary *marja'*, using as source material the official online biographies of fourteen Shi'i scholars who currently lay claim to the position. Based on a conceptualization of the *marja'iyya* as a Bourdesian field, it has offered a micro study of scholarly capital and its constitutive elements. The *marāji'*'s credentials of scholarly capital have been explored in relation to three sub-types: inherited scholarly capital, as determined by their family background; educational capital acquired through their training in the seminaries and the certifications they obtained; and the intellectual-scientific prestige capital derived from their activities as scholars and teachers. The article has also sought to capture more broadly the dynamics at play in the definition of scholarly capital within and by this competitive *marja'iyya* field. Put differently, scholarly capital is a stake not just a means for the positioning of the many *marāji'* in the field. The ambition of this article was thus not to provide a detailed map of each of their independent claims but to identify the general features of scholarly capital in light of these many claims.

The credentials of scholarly capital put forward in the *marāji*'s biographies are diverse. Yet a common and hence the most defining feature of scholarly capital is its constitution on the basis of social networks and the resources available in them – that is social capital. Family networks are at the core of inherited scholarly capital. A source of scholarly capital is the symbolic capital associated with a clerical family background. Families, clerical and possibly lay, are also credited to have contributed to the *marāji*'s disposition to knowledge (scholarly capital in its embodied state), as well as sometimes to its acquisition (educational capital). Scholarly networks, in particular teacher-student ones, inform the constitution of the acquired forms of scholarly capital. Given the personalistic nature of knowledge transmission in the *ḥawza*, the *marāji*'s educational capital is validated mainly in reference to their teachers. These teachers or other scholars further certified their *ijtihād* in more or less formalized ways. With regard to intellectual-scientific prestige capital, the scholarship produced by the *marāji* partly draws from the scholarly networks they belong to, as attested by the practice of publishing notes of a teacher's lectures or commentaries of his works. Finally, the centrality of scholarly networks is apparent in the role played by the *marāji* in developing networks of learning through their role as teachers. According to Bourdieu, social capital has two components: the size of the network that a person possesses, as well as the volume of capital held by the different agents in the network and to which a person gains access.⁸³ If size is also emphasized in the biographies, the quality of the *marāji*'s family and scholarly networks – that is the network members' own scholarly capital in the symbolic form or put simply their scholarly fame – seems particularly important.

This study of the scholarly capital credentials of several contemporary *marāji* also sheds light on how scholarly capital is defined and possibly redefined within a field characterized by many competitive claims to the position. The biographies generally follow well-established codes and practices when validating the scholarly credentials of the *marāji*. The credentials

identified in this article, including the topoi of intellectual precocity and of an unwavering determination in the quest for knowledge, echo those found in older (auto-)biographical works on Shi'i scholars.⁸⁴ Moreover, the same credentials are put forth in the biographies of the *marāji'* I have categorized as belonging to either of the older and younger generations, as well as of those whose scholarly status is more or less broadly recognized among Shi'i clerical and lay circles. If a *marja'* lacks a type of credential claimed by his competitors, an almost-like credential is provided instead. Offering a new type of credential, which would have been the logical subversive strategy to either compensate for one's shortcomings or to distinguish oneself from the rest of the *marāji'*, does not appear to be an appealing option. Even the biography of Mahmud al-Sarkhi, who is an anti-establishment and controversial *marja'*, addresses the themes also found in 'Ali al-Sistani's biography. As this article has argued, there is a degree of homogeneity in the ways scholarly capital is defined, although self-representation might not always match actual qualifications.

The *marja'iyya* field is competitive and heterogeneous, yet it remains quite stable. This is so because of the double yet paradoxical aim of the competition. Each of the *marāji'* strives towards the most dominant position. However, this internal competition should not put the existence of the field at risk. Scholarly capital is both a stake in the field's struggles and, as the type of capital that precisely justifies the 'theodicy of [the *marāji'*]'s own privileges', the *raison d'être* of the field. The conservation and accumulation of the capital that is the basis of the authority of the clerical establishment in general and the *marja'iyya* in particular is the priority. More broadly, intra-clerical competition is mitigated by the shared interest to preserve the status of the religious scholars in contemporary Shi'i society.

¹ Nubdha Mukhtasara 'an Hayat Samaha al-Marja' al-Dini al-A'la Ayat Allah al-'Uzma al-Sayyid al-Sarkhi al-Hasani. Available at www.al-hasany.net.

² I borrow this term from C. Arminjon Hachem (2013) *Chiisme et État: Les Clercs à l'Épreuve de la Modernité* (Paris: CNRS), p. 188.

³ As of September 2018, the Wikipedia entry 'List of Current Maraji' (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_Maraji) provided 72 names.

⁴ R. J. Abisaab (2009) Lebanese Shi'ites and the *Marja'iyya*: Polemic in the Late Twentieth Century, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 36(2), p. 217.

⁵ L. Clarke (2001) The Shi'i Construction of *Taqlīd*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 12(1), pp. 50–51. For different views on the requirement of *a'lamīyya* (superiority in knowledge), see R. Gleave (2007) Conceptions of Authority in Iraqi Shi'ism: Baqir al-Hakim, Ha'iri and Sistani on *Ijtihād*, *Taqlīd* and *Marja'iyya*, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(2), pp. 69–70.

⁶ On the selection of the *marja'* from a grassroots perspective, see J. Cappucci (2015) Selecting a Spiritual Authority: The *Maraji' al-Taqlid* among First- and Second-Wave Iraqi Shi'a Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan, *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, 8(1), pp. 5–17.

⁷ Abisaab, Lebanese Shi'ites and the *Marja'iyya*, p. 217. For studies that explore the sociological working of the *marja'iyya*, see, inter alia, L. S. Walbridge (2014) *The Thread of Mu'awiya: The Making of a Marja' Taqlid* (Bloomington: The Ramsay Press); E. Corboz (2015) *Guardians of Shi'ism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

⁸ For additional reasons behind the current multiplicity of *marāji'*, see E. Corboz (2017) The Najafi *Marja'iyya* in the Age of Iran's *Vali-ye Faqih* (Guardian Jurist): Can it Resist?, *POMPES Studies*, 28 (New Analysis of Shia Politics), p. 11.

⁹ S. Rosiny (2007) The Twelver Shia Online: Challenges for its Religious Authorities, in: A. Monsutti, S. Naef & F. Sabahi (eds) *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia* (Bern: Peter Lang), p. 252.

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- ¹⁰ For such studies, see M. Litvak (1998) *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); R. Mauriello (2011) *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History: A Case Study, the Ši'i Religious Establishment of al-Nağaf (Iraq)* (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra).
- ¹¹ P. Bourdieu & L. J. D. Wacquant (1992) *An Invitation To Self-Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), p. 98.
- ¹² P. Bourdieu (1986) The Forms of Capital, in: J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood).
- ¹³ P. Bourdieu (1987) What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32, p. 4.
- ¹⁴ P. Bourdieu (1984) *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit), pp. 60–61.
- ¹⁵ P. Bourdieu (1993) *Sociology in Question*, transl. by Richard Nice (London: Sage), p.73.
- ¹⁶ Bourdieu & Wacquant, *An Invitation*, pp. 98–100.
- ¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, pp. 73–74.
- ¹⁸ While several *marāji'* have multilingual websites, I have used the Arabic version of their biography.
- ¹⁹ On this title, see S. Rizvi (2018) The Making of a *Marja'*: Sīstānī and Shi'i Religious Authority in the Contemporary Age, *Sociology of Islam*, 6(2), pp. 172–173.
- ²⁰ Bourdieu & Wacquant, *An Invitation*, p. 98.
- ²¹ Muhammad Al Shubayr al-Khaqani and Fadil al-Maliki, two Iraq-based claimants to the *marja'iyya*, were for instance not included because their websites were out of order at the time of research. The websites of the *marāji'* under consideration were last consulted in July 2017.
- ²² For his biography, see Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at www.sistani.org/arabic/data/1.
- ²³ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at <http://alfayadh.org/ar/#acquaintance>.

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- ²⁴ Lamha Mujaza min Hayat Samaha al-Marja' al-Dini al-Kabir al-Sayyid Muhammad Sa'id al-Tabataba'i al-Hakim. Available at www.alhakeem.com/arabic/alhakeem/sira/index.htm.
- ²⁵ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at www.alnajafy.com/list/mainnews-1-444-1.html.
- ²⁶ Al-Sira al-'Atira. Available at www.ghoraifi-alnajaf.org/?id=18.
- ²⁷ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at www.marjaiaa.com/ifm.1/.
- ²⁸ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at <http://yaqoobi.com/arabic/6/5038.html>. The English version of this biography (Biography. Available at www.yaqoobi.de/index.php/en-us/biography-en) was also used to complement the less detailed Arabic one.
- ²⁹ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at <http://m-sanad.com/ar/cv>.
- ³⁰ Al-Sira. Available at www.husseinalsader.org/inp/view_wp.asp?ID=5. Al-Sadr's website does not introduce him as a *marja' al-dīnī* but since his biography does, this scholar has been included in my selection of *marāji'*.
- ³¹ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at <http://almodarresi.com/ar/sirah>.
- ³² Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at www.alhaeri.org/main.php#bio.
- ³³ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. Available at <http://arabic.shirazi.ir/showpage.php?Id=106>.
- ³⁴ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya. <http://www.hashemishahrudi.org/ar/page/2>.
- ³⁵ In the following discussion, endnote references to the biographies are only provided when the biography specifically referred to is not explicitly introduced in the main text.
- ³⁶ Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, pp. 48–49.
- ³⁷ Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 60.
- ³⁸ Salih al-Ta'i's biography does not provide any information on his family background and is therefore not included in this section. The Arabic version of Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi's biography does not delve into his family background, but the Persian version briefly refers to this father (*Zindiginamah*. Available at: <http://www.hashemishahrudi.org/fa/page/1>).

³⁹ This is the case of ‘Ali al-Sistani, Sa‘id al-Hakim, Kazim al-Ha’iri, Bashir al-Najafi, Sadiq al-Shirazi, Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, A‘la al-Din al-Ghurayfi, Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi, Husayn al-Sadr, and Muhammad al-Ya‘qubi.

⁴⁰ See the biographies of Sa‘id al-Hakim, Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, and Sadiq al-Shirazi.

⁴¹ Naming a scholar with the title of one of his works is a mark of honor (Litvak, *Shi‘i Scholars*, p. 98).

⁴² A‘lam Al al-Ya‘qubi. Available at <http://yaqoobi.com/arabic/savant.html>.

⁴³ Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Those are the words used in A‘la al-Din al-Ghurayfi’s biography.

⁴⁵ Ishaq al-Fayyad, Muhammad al-Sanad, and Mahmud al-Sarkhi are not from a clerical family.

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, p. 60.

⁴⁷ K. Sindawi (2007), *Hawza* Instruction and its Role in Shaping Modern Shi‘ite Identity: The *Hawzas* of al-Najaf and Qumm as a Case Study, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 43(6), pp. 839–842. A comparative study of the curriculum of Najaf in 1913 and currently points to an overall continuity (R. P. Mottahedeh (2016) The Najaf Hawzah Curriculum, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 26(1-2), pp. 341–351).

⁴⁸ Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi’s biography is an exception.

⁴⁹ See the biographies of ‘Ali al-Sistani, Ishaq al-Fayyad, Sa‘id al-Hakim, Bashir al-Najafi, Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi, Husayn al-Sadr, and A‘la al-Din al-Ghurayfi.

⁵⁰ This refers to the examination students had to pass to receive a stipend from al-Khu‘i. On this system of monthly examinations, see Sindawi, *Hawza* Instruction, p. 843.

⁵¹ Being ‘crowned’ by a renowned scholar is a source of legitimacy (A. W. Rasiah (2007) *City of Knowledge: The Development of Shi‘i Religious Learning with Particular Attention to the Hawzah ‘Ilmiyah* of Qum, PhD thesis, University of California, p. 176).

⁵² See, respectively, the biographies of Husayn al-Sadr, Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi, and Kazim al-Ha'iri, and those of Salih al-Ta'i, Muhammad al-Ya'qubi, and Mahmud al-Sarkhi.

⁵³ Al-Sira al-Dhatiyya fi Suwar. Available at <http://www.hashemishahrudi.org/ar/gallery/category/502>.

⁵⁴ See also Mahmud al-Sarkhi's biography for the portrayal of his 'filial' relationship with Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.

⁵⁵ See the biographies of Ishaq al-Fayyad and Muhammad al-Ya'qubi.

⁵⁶ S. Mervin (2000) *Un réformisme chiite: ulémas et lettrés du Gabal 'Amil (actuel Liban-Sud) de la fin de l'Empire ottoman à l'indépendance du Liban* (Paris: Karthala / Beirut: Centre d'études et de recherches sur le Moyen-Orient contemporain / Damascus: Institut français d'études arabes de Damas), p. 75.

⁵⁷ Mottahedeh, *The Najaf Hawzah Curriculum*, p. 345.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The English, not the Arabic, version of al-Ya'qubi's biography details this story.

⁶² See the biographies of Muhammad al-Ya'qubi, Muhammad al-Sanad, and Mahmud al-Sarkhi.

⁶³ Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, pp. 50–51.

⁶⁴ On the *ijāzat al-riwāya*, see N. Kondo (2009) Shi'i 'Ulama and *Ijaza* during the Nineteenth Century, *Orient*, 44, pp. 55–76; S. Schmidtke (2006) Forms and Functions of 'Licences to Transmit' (*Ijazas*) in 18th-Century-Iran: 'Abd Allah al-Musawi al-Jaza'iri al-Tustari's (1112–73/1701–59) *Ijaza Kabira*, in: G. Krämer & S. Schmidtke (eds) *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, pp. 95–127 (Leiden: Brill).

⁶⁵ D. J. Stewart (2001) *Islamic Juridical Hierarchies and the Office of Marji‘ al-Taqlīd*, in: Clarke, L. (ed.) *Shi‘ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions* (Binghamton: Global Publications), pp. 155–156. On what this authorization actually entails, see Kondo, Shi‘i ‘Ulama and *Ijaza*, pp. 59–61.

⁶⁶ See the biographies of Sa‘id al-Hakim, Ishaq al-Fayyad, Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi, and Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi.

⁶⁷ Schmidtke, *Forms and Functions of ‘Licences to Transmit’*, pp. 99–100.

⁶⁸ Those are the words used in Husayn al-Sadr’s biography.

⁶⁹ See the biographies of ‘Ali al-Sistani, Sadiq al-Shirazi, and Salih al-Ta’i.

⁷⁰ For other examples along the same lines, see the biographies of Sadiq al-Shirazi, Mahmud al-Sarkhi, and Salih al-Ta’i.

⁷¹ According to the usage of these titles in the 20th century, *al-fāḍil* is used for students who have completed the *muqaddamāt*, *thiqat al-islām* after the *suṭūḥ*, and *ḥujjat al-islām* for those enrolled in the *baḥth al-khārij* who are not yet a *mujtahid*. The title *‘allāma* is used generically for clerics, regardless of their level of education (Sindawi, *Hawza* Instruction, p. 844).

⁷² Mahmud al-Sarkhi’s *ishkalāt* are also listed in the section of his biography dedicated to his publications, with explanatory notes that such or such work ‘discusses and invalidates the views of [so-and-so]’.

⁷³ Those are the words used in Bashir al-Najafi’s biography.

⁷⁴ The biographies of Kazim al-Ha’iri and Muhammad al-Ya‘qubi add a brief description of the topic covered in the listed books.

⁷⁵ One exception is Husayn al-Sadr who has not yet issued a *risāla ‘amaliyya* proper.

⁷⁶ On the emergence of the *risāla ‘amaliyya* genre along the development of the *marja‘iyya* in the nineteenth century, see Stewart, *Islamic Juridical Hierarchies*, pp. 154–155. More generally on the *risāla ‘amaliyya*, see R. P. Mottahedeh (2011) *The Quandaries of Emulation: The*

Theory and Politics of Shi'i Manuals of Practice, The Ninth Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture in Arab and Islamic Studies (Seattle: University of Washington).

⁷⁷ This is the case of Ishaq al-Fayyad, 'Ali al-Sistani, Sa'id al-Hakim, and Mahmud al-Hashimi al-Shahrudi, who all belong to the older generation. On *Minhaj al-Salihin* and *Tawzih al-Masa'il*, see H. Modarressi Tabataba'i (1984) *An Introduction to Shi'i Law: A Bibliographical Study* (London: Ithaca Press), p. 100.

⁷⁸ The biography of Husayn al-Sadr does not discuss his teaching activities.

⁷⁹ See in particular the biographies of 'Ali al-Sistani and Bashir al-Najafi which elaborate the most on teaching methodology, although the former does not teach anymore.

⁸⁰ These are the words used in Kazim al-Ha'iri's biography.

⁸¹ Schmidtke, *Forms and Functions of 'Licences to Transmit'*, p. 100.

⁸² See the biographies of 'Ali al-Sistani, Sa'id al-Hakim, Bashir al-Najafi, Sadiq al-Shirazi, and Kazim al-Ha'iri.

⁸³ Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, p. 51.

⁸⁴ See for instance M. al-Husayni 'Amili (1998) *Autobiographie d'un clerc chiite du Gabal 'Amil: tiré de, Les notables chiites (A'yan al-Ši'a)*, trans. and annotated S. Mervin and H. al-Amin (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas).

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